



Chickenpox

Public Health Services Department - Health Education and Promotion Section

2nd Edition - March 2024

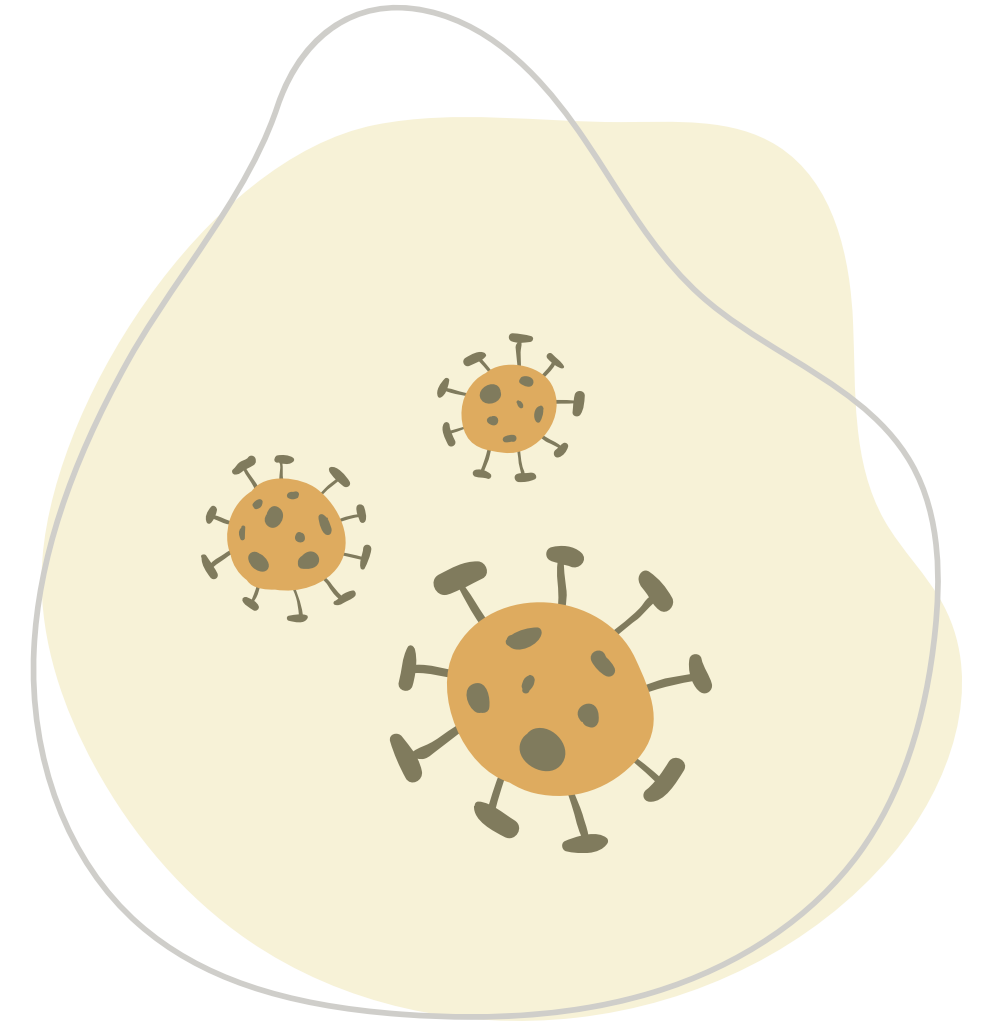
Introduction:

- Chickenpox is a viral infection that is transmitted through the respiratory tract. It causes itching, skin rash and small fluid-filled blisters.
- It is highly contagious and the symptoms usually disappear after 5 – 10 days.



Causes:

- Varicella Zoster virus causes chickenpox.



Predisposing factors of chickenpox:



Not taking the chickenpox vaccine



Not having chickenpox before



Diseases that lower the immune system such as cancer



Using of immunosuppressive drugs

High Risk Groups:



Teenagers



Pregnant women



Newborns



Immunocompromised patients



Elderly

Modes of Transmission:



·It spreads easily through airborne respiratory droplets during coughing or sneezing from an infected person to healthy person.



It spreads from one person to another through direct or indirect contact with skin rash.

Incubation Period:

- Symptoms appear 10 – 21 days after viral infection.



Symptoms:

- Skin rash is the main clinical symptom of chickenpox.
- Symptoms last for 5 – 10 days.
- Other symptoms which could develop 1 – 2 days before skin rash, include:



Fatigue



Headache



Loss of appetite



Fever

Symptoms:

- Most cases of chickenpox initially develop on face, chest and back. After that, it spreads to other parts of the body.
- Chickenpox rash passes through three stages:

First Stage



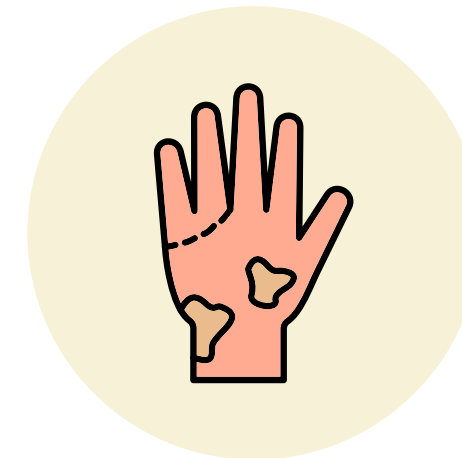
Formation of pink or red blisters (papules)

Second Stage



Formation of blisters filled with a small amount of fluid (vesicles) within 1 day. Later, it ruptures and fluid leaks.

Third Stage



Crusts cover the ruptured blisters and require multiple days to disappear.

Diagnosis:

- In general, doctors diagnose chickenpox by identifying the skin rash (physical examination).
- If there is some doubt about the diagnosis, infection can be confirmed through laboratory investigations (blood test or lab examination of blister fluids to detect the virus).



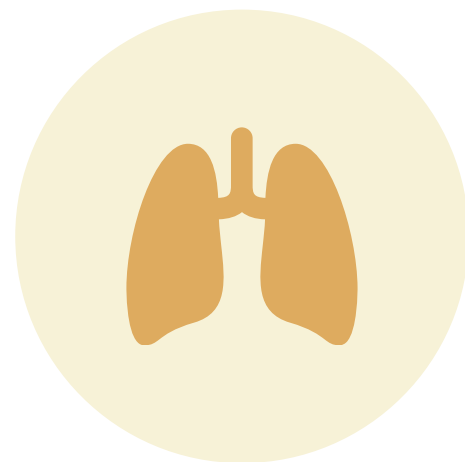
Complications:



**Encephalitis
(Brain Infection)**



**Bacterial infection in
skin, bones and joints**



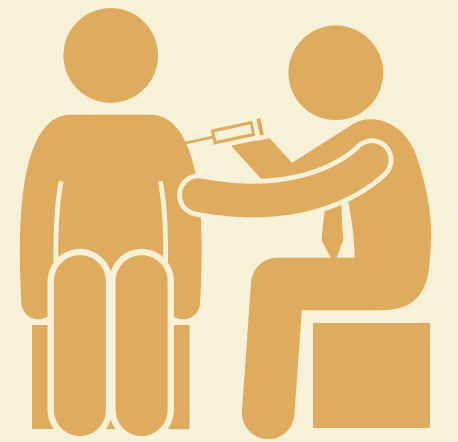
**Pneumonia
(Lung Infection)**



**Septicemia
(Blood Infection)**

Complications:

- The best prevention against chickenpox is vaccination (if you haven't been infected with chickenpox before).
- The vaccine is safe and effective that most of those who are vaccinated will never get chickenpox again.
- In case of re-infection, the vaccine contributes to reducing the severity of symptoms, and become limited to few red spots as well as low grade fever or no fever at all.



When should you visit the doctor?



When the rash spreads to one or both eyes.



When you experience swelling, redness of the skin rash, which suggests a secondary bacterial infection.



When skin rash is accompanied by other symptoms, such as; tachycardia, severe cough, vomiting, neck stiffness or high grade fever (over 38.9 ° C.).

Treatment:

- Sometimes, the doctor may prescribe anti-histamines to relieve itching.
- Also, the doctor may prescribe antiviral medications to the patients who are at a greater risk to develop complications. This will help in shortening the duration of infection as well as reducing the risk of complications.



Lifestyle modifications and home remedies:

You can follow self-care measures at home to relieve chickenpox symptoms:

Avoid skin scratching

Use hand gloves, especially at night and while trimming nails.



Relieving itching and other symptoms

Take a shower with cold water mixed with baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) or oatmeal (oatmeal should be soaked in lukewarm water for few minutes until the milky liquid comes out, which in turn will relieve itching).



Prevention

The best prevention against chickenpox is vaccination.

First dose:

The first dose of the chickenpox vaccine (Varicella 1) is given at 12 months.

Second dose:

The second dose of chickenpox vaccine (Varicella 2) is given at 5-6 years of age.